



More Tips for Internal Customer Service

Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers, so here are 3 more ways to keep your employees happy.

By Scott Miller

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Customer service is a major focus of many successful companies. And many of those companies have determined that making employees happy leads to legendary customer service. In apparent defiance of accepted wisdom, some customer-focused companies even place employees in the top spot on their organizational charts. Leaders in those companies share the philosophy of former UPS CEO Kent Nelson, who said, "Employee satisfaction equals customer satisfaction at UPS."

So how do you achieve employee satisfaction? Just as customer service leads to customer satisfaction, internal customer service leads to employee satisfaction. Internal customer service is the service we provide fellow employees and other departments within our own organizations, as well as our suppliers and anyone else with whom we work to get our jobs done. It is what we do when a colleague asks us to provide him with information he needs to analyze a product or service; it is what we say when someone from marketing asks us to represent the company at an event; it is how we greet the vice president of sales when she walks into our office with an "I need something from you" expression on her face.

KMA Inc. recently had the pleasure of moderating a Breakfast Roundtable on internal customer service at the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce with co-facilitators Patricia Wheeler of The Levin Group and Jeff Frakes, Ph.D., of Performance Innovations Inc. Roundtable participants--businesspeople from throughout the metro area--used force field analysis to determine the top three "driving forces" that work to facilitate internal customer service, and the top three "restraining forces" that work against internal customer service.

We draw our tips this month from the number-one restraining force determined by the roundtable participants: building territorial walls within your company. As you strive to weaken the forces that work against internal customer service--in this case the building of territorial walls--you will enable internal customer service, and employee satisfaction, to grow.

Here are three tips for achieving legendary internal customer service by weakening the tendency to build territorial walls:

1. Create forums to share information. Do this as much as your position in your organization permits. The more employees know about the goals of the company as a whole, and how each department contributes to accomplishing those goals, the less likely they are to feel a need to "protect" themselves and their jobs by building walls around their "turf." One way a football quarterback enables his team to execute successful plays is by making sure every player understands what his teammates are doing in the play. Members of a football team do not advance the ball by keeping their plans secret from one another. Colleagues in a company do not advance their plans by withholding information or assistance from one another. You might think that marketing and accounts receivable can execute flawless plays independent of one another, but they can't. Accounts receivable depends on marketing to help create a market for the company's product or service, and marketing depends on accounts receivable to collect the money that will pay marketing and fund their budget.

Forums for sharing information can be as grand as a company-wide assembly or as modest as a chat in the hall. A shared lunch between two departments would qualify, as would e-mails and memos outlining what a particular department is doing and why.

2. Practice proactive information-sharing. Don't wait for colleagues to ask for information they need to do their jobs. Offer it to them. Offer it before they need it. In fact, offer it before they know they need it. Think of ways that your information/statistics/data can help others in your organization, and tell them. If part of your job description already involves preparing information for others, do it as though you are delivering a product to a customer. Most will appreciate your interest and openness, recognize your keen insight, and eventually repay you by knocking down their own walls.

3. Create, or contribute to, an environment in which status is accorded to those who share freely and don't build walls. Most people who build territorial walls do it to protect their turf from encroachment by others in the company. They fear that if others have what they have--including information--those others will make them obsolete. Make that fear groundless by rewarding employees and colleagues who do not protect their turf, but instead work to fulfill the goals of the company. Reward behaviors--via compliments, pats on the back, commendations at meetings, lunch, bonuses, letters of congratulation, etc.--that lead to open information-sharing. Make it clear that territorial behavior sabotages the efforts of the company, while treating colleagues like valued customers contributes to the company's success.